



WORKING REMOTELY WITHOUT GOING STIR CRAZY



When Bubonic Plague closed Cambridge University in 1665, Isaac Newton had to work from home. With nothing to distract him, he threw himself into his passion of mathematics and developed his three laws of motion. Quite a solid achievement, but then he didn't have to respond to his scientist mates sending gifs or questionable memes. Fast forward to 2020 and working from home is now a common option.

Working remotely is a bit like Vegemite in that you either love it or hate it. With the high probability that the coronavirus (COVID-19) will also hasten an outbreak of laptops on the kitchen table, first timers may find the isolation and lack of office banter hard to handle. Many of these may be younger workers who are used to being organised.

Here are some essential strategies for a positive work at home experience.

DRESS FOR WORK

- That means no pyjamas or tracksuits. Sorry, but no. Once you start down that road, it's all downhill.
- You don't have to wear the full jacket and tie or heels, however you're going to work even if it is in the next room. Dress as if your boss is going to knock on the front door and you'll feel more empowered and in the right headspace. There is evidence to show that symbolic dressing for specific contexts or events helps your psychology line up with the job at hand.

CREATE A STRUCTURE

- Even artists and writers have a structure: they don't just paint or write when they feel like it. They show up regularly and set goals for themselves. You might think being creative is a free for all, but Stephen King is not the only author who writes 2000 words, 365 days a year.
- You don't have to start at 8 or 9. One of the advantages of being at home is that you can optimise your day around your most creative and focused time.
- For example, we know people who like to get up at 6:00am and work until about 11:00am. That's because experience has taught them that's when they do their most focused, detailed or conceptual work. They might then take a break do some exercise and have lunch. In the afternoon, they do the more pedestrian work that doesn't require full brain bench-strength, like administration.

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SET ASIDE TIME TO DEAL WITH EMAILS

- A big trap at home is to keep glancing at your email. A good strategy is to let your team or boss know that you will look at emails mid-morning and then again in mid-afternoon. If they have anything genuinely urgent, they can call you, but if you are working on something that needs your full attention, make sure they know so you won't be distracted.

DESIGNATE A WORK AREA

- You might not have the luxury of a study or separate room so dining table it is. That's fine. Just set it up so it works for you and at the end of the day, put things away, which is also a signal for you to wind down, stop work and change gear.

TAKE FREQUENT SHORT BREAKS FROM THE COMPUTER

- Go outside, walk around, stretch, look at your overgrown garden or walk to the shops. You can even set yourself a goal: "If I finish A then I'll go out for a coffee."
- Make sure you take at least one 30-minute walk during the day or go to the gym in the middle of the day when it's not busy. That way you'll have social contact and come back with a fresh brain.
- Take short morning and afternoon tea breaks to talk to a friend or colleague on the phone, Facetime or Skype. You won't be the only one at home and staying connected can help the potential downsides of isolation.

LET YOUR MANAGER KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORKING ON

- This is reassurance for you as much as them. You have a plan, you let everyone know on Microsoft teams, Slack or whatever you use and everyone's on the same page. It also keeps you from flipping around between tasks, which can happen if you're not used to being away from the structure of natural office rhythms.

DISTRACTED EASILY? MAKE YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

- It's easy to find other things to do at home. But a little displacement activity can wreck your day. A quick wipe of the oven can turn into a full clean and your time has gone. Fret not, you're not the only one who gets distracted.
- Use something like Focusmate as your "accountability partner". That's another home worker who keeps an eye on you while you are at your desk. You can even check in on Messenger but don't get caught up chatting. Leave that for a ten minute coffee break. There are so many options out there for remote workers so ask around and see what others do to make it work well for them.

NEXT STEPS?

For more help with transitioning to remote work and keeping your work life balance call **1300 YOUR EAP (1300 687 633)** or email consulting@convergeintl.com.au

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